

29th Circuit Children's Division
Jasper County
Site Selection #3

Demographics

Jasper County is located in the Southwestern corner of the state of Missouri. According to the 2000 census, there were 104,686 persons residing in the county. This was a 15.7% increase from the 1990 census and the city of Joplin is the largest community within Jasper County. Joplin has 45,504 residents with the next largest city being the county seat, Carthage, with a population of 12,668. There are numerous smaller communities that make up the remaining population of Jasper County. The racial make up of the county as of the 2000 census is as follows:

92.58%-White	1.48%-African American
1.33%-Native American	.69%-Asian
0.06%-Pacific Islander	3.45%-Hispanic or Latino
2.24%-from two or more races	1.62%-Other

Geographical Description

Jasper County borders the state of Kansas to the west, the county of Newton to the south, the county of Lawrence to the east and the county of Barton to the north. The county covers an area of 641 square miles. Interstate 44 provides passage for residents to travel east through Springfield and onto St. Louis and west into Oklahoma and beyond. The county has easy transportation connections with Highway 71 that runs north to the Kansas City area and south into Arkansas. Within the city of Joplin, there is a Municipal Airport that provides several daily flights into St. Louis for connections into the larger cities throughout the United States.

General Information

St. Johns Medical Center is a major hospital and employs a total of 2655. Health care opportunities are also available in Carthage through McCune Brooks which has 55 beds available.

There are several manufacturing companies in Jasper County. Leggitt and Platt Inc. is located in Carthage and employ 2420 individuals locally. There are also several major trucking companies based out in this area, CFI employs 2079 individuals, TriState has 800 employees and Sitton Motor employs 650. Eagle Picher employs 2000 individuals and the local Wal-Mart stores have over 895 employees. The food industry includes General Mills with 585 employees and Schrieber Foods with 650 employees.

Jasper County is the home of Missouri Southern State University (MSSU). Jasper County also has educational opportunities available with Vatterott College, Ozark Christian College, and Franklin Technical Center.

Economic Data

Unemployment in Jasper County has a current rate of 5.6%. Jasper County enjoys one of the lowest housing costs in the U.S. The average value of existing homes in the area is \$86,005. New three-bedroom homes typically range from \$70,000 to \$105,000. Rent prices for homes range from \$325 to \$550 per month. A variety of apartment complexes offer furnished or unfurnished apartments ranging from \$250 to \$450 per month. The county has Section 8 housing available as well as several Income Based Apartment complexes to assist families in finding affordable housing. The low cost of housing includes one of the lowest residential property taxes in the Midwest. The median income for a family in the county is \$37,611.

Transportation

Jasper County does not have a public transportation system. The MAPS busses, (Metro Area Paratransit System) are available to take qualified individuals for medical appointments. There are also local Taxi companies available that offer Cab Coupons and reduced fares for eligible individuals.

Population Served

According to KIDS Count 2002, Jasper ranks 106 out of 115 counties (1=best, 115=worst) children make up 25.7% of the county's population. Of these children 12.1% are minority children and 19.2% of the county's children are living in poverty. 29.6% of the children in Jasper County receive food stamps.

Several social issues continue to be areas of concern for Jasper County. These issues include a high number of mothers (who recently have given birth) without high school diplomas as well a high number of teenage pregnancies. There are an alarmingly high number of children that do not complete high school in the county. The high number of child abuse and neglect reports has led to a correspondingly high rate of out of home placements and a large number of children in state custody in Jasper County.

As of July 2003, Jasper County has 568 children in custody. The circuit has 166 licensed foster homes, 70 licensed relative/kinship homes and 43 licensed respite homes.

Jasper County Self Evaluation

The purpose of this study was to look at four separate Children's Division outcomes in Jasper County and to attempt to ascertain the factors which influenced those outcomes. The four outcomes considered include:

- Number of children per thousand reported for child abuse and neglect in Jasper Co.
- Number of children per thousand reported for child abuse and neglect in Jasper Co. who are determined as probable cause.
- Number of children per thousand who entered DFS custody in Jasper Co.
- Percentage of children in DFS custody that are returned to their parents in Jasper Co.

The study was conducted through a combination of meetings with groups of staff and representatives of the Juvenile Office and the Children's Center, individual conferences with staff and gathering of statistical information.

Jasper County appears to be unique in several characteristics which affect the Children's Division, the most notable being the high incidence of methamphetamine usage and production. Jasper County does have a very high rate of reporting of child abuse and neglect with a much higher percentage of reports coming from law enforcement than in other judicial circuits. The combination of the high reporting rate, the high percentage of reports coming from law enforcement, and the high incidence of methamphetamine has probably led to a higher percentage of children having a probable cause finding.

With the higher level of probable cause which is an indication that abuse or neglect has occurred there is a result of higher entry rate into foster care. Children are taken into custody when a team member believes that they cannot safely remain in their own home. The challenge for all the members of the team is to find services which will assure the safety of the children with them remaining in the home. Oftentimes the services which the family would need are of an intensive nature and no openings are available for these services.

Many children entering care means that Jasper County has a large number of children in care. After children enter care, work is focused toward a permanency option, with reunification being the preferred choice. All members of the team are constantly assessing what will need to occur for the children to safely return to their parents. Jasper County does return fewer children to their parents than many other circuits. Once again, the challenge for all members of the team is assessing when children may safely return home and identifying, finding, and providing the services needed to create safety for the children when they return home. Oftentimes the services needed are very intensive such as family reunion services, but no openings are available. There is more need than service available due to maximum use of availability.

Community Involvement

Jasper County is a one county circuit. There continues to be a strong working relationship between the staff of the Children's Division and the Juvenile Office. Team meetings are held on cases where all interested parties are invited to attend and have equal input. Jasper county children are represented in team meetings and in court proceedings by active Guardian ad Litem. CASA volunteers are also assigned to cases by the Judge. The local law enforcement entities are involved and very invested in the well being of the children of Jasper County. Forensic interviews are done with a team approach at the Children's Center of Southwest Missouri located in Joplin. These interviews are taped and dictated for use in criminal prosecution.

Jasper County has a wealth of services available to families such as: in-patient and out-patient treatment for substance abuse and aftercare planning, services for domestic violence and an extensive array of counseling services both for individuals and groups. There are also numerous private counseling establishments as well as church based

services available. The Salvation Army has emergency housing and shelter programs available.

The Missouri work force development center is centrally located in Joplin and has services available to families on line that can be accessed from outset areas such as Carthage.

Jasper County has also welcomed the partnership of “Children’s Haven” in the past year. This facility is a crisis nursery that is available to any family that needs to have temporary placement for their children when other resources are not available. Children do not have to be placed in the custody of Children’s Division to access this placement

Jasper County works as part of a strong partnership with all of the schools. Each school in the county has a school based social worker. These individuals continue to be part of the treatment team for children when the Children’s Division becomes involved with the family.

Caseloads and Staffing

There are 52 Social Service Worker allocations in the 29th Circuit. All of these workers are based in the Jasper County office. Of these 52 social service staff there is an Adoption Specialist, an Adoption Subsidy Worker, a Foster Care Licensing Worker, a Foster Home Training Worker, 11 full time Investigators of Child Abuse/Neglect, three Intensive In-Home Specialists / Family Reunification Workers, four Family Centered Service Workers, 29 Family Centered out of Home Workers, and one worker who specializes in working with older youth. There are six supervisor positions, one Social Work Specialist position and one circuit manager for the county/circuit. An Independent Living Specialist and a Title IV-E Specialist are also located in the Jasper County Office.

Family centered out of home workers carry an average caseload of 23 families. Family centered workers carry an average of 13 cases per worker. Hotline investigators average between 17 - 19 cases per month. Regular family support team meetings and a designated time frame for permanence have helped move children to quicker permanence.

Federal Outcomes

The Federal Outcomes identified for the Child and Family Services Review address child safety, permanence and well being. Jasper County has met 2 of the 6 Federal outcomes during the first two quarters of 2003.

Foster Care Re-entries – Of all children who entered foster care during the year under review, percent that re-entered foster care within 12 months of a prior foster care stay

- Federal Benchmark – 8.6% or less
- 29th Circuit – 16.5%

Length of Time to Achieve Adoption – Of all children who exited foster care during the year under review to a final adoption, the percent of children who exited care in less than 24 months from the time of the latest removal from home

- Federal Benchmark – 32% or more
- 29th Circuit – 47.7%

Recurrence of Maltreatment – Of all children, who were substantiated victims of child abuse / neglect during the first six months, what percent had another substantiated report within six months

- Federal Benchmark – 5.9% or fewer
- 29th Circuit – 8.4%

Incidence of Child Abuse and Neglect in Foster Care (by foster parent or residential facility staff) – of all children in foster care in the state during the period under review, the percentage of children who were the subject of substantiated or indicated maltreatment by a foster parent or residential facility staff

- Federal Benchmark - .57% or less
- 29th Circuit – .0%

Stability of Foster Care Placements – of all children who have been in foster care less than 12 months from the time of the latest removal, the percent of children who had no more than 2 placement settings

- Federal Benchmark – 86.7% or more
- 29th Circuit – 72.9%

Length of Time to Achieve Reunification – of all children who were reunified with their parents or caretaker at the time of discharge from foster care, the percentage of children who were reunified in less than 12 months from the time of the latest removal for home

- Federal Benchmark – 76.2% or more
- 29th Circuit – 61.5%